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CHANGING WELLESLEY



Lifelong residents of the Woodlands neighborhood of Wellesley, Peter and JoAnn Jones, in the backyard garden they have cultivated over the years. WICKED LOCAL STAFF PHOTO / KATE FLOCK

The Woodlands

Once close-knit community faces uncertain future

By Jordan Mayblum
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The last neighborhood Fourth of July parade wrapped up decades ago. The small cape houses that once dotted the landscape of the Woodlands neighborhood are continuously dwindling, with a steady stream of larger houses being built in their stead.

"Our house was—I think—the second house built in this neighborhood," said JoAnn Jones, who was born JoAnn Leyland in 1952 and has lived near the corner of Halsey Avenue and Turner Road virtually

ever since. Her dad purchased the land, like all of the original neighbors, when he returned from World War II.

"The deal was the vets were coming home," Jones said, "and either the vet or his wife had to be a Wellesley resident." That was the case for her family, and they bought the property at 5 Halsey Ave. for \$650 in 1946. "If you didn't build then it went back to the town."

They fulfilled the requirement to build on the land within one-and-a-half years, and the property has been in the family for nearly 70 years

now. During that stretch, the large forest land just steps from their home—the North 40—has remained relatively untouched, save for a period of time at the beginning when the town used it as a landfill.

Now, the college is looking to sell the 46-acre patch of land. The town is a potential suitor, but so too are developers who could add more houses—and, according to JoAnn and her husband, Peter Jones, more strain—on a neighborhood that's seen its character evolve dramatically in recent years.

"The people in this neighborhood came from

the same start. We all had a common bond in the neighborhood," she said. "When I run into someone new in the neighborhood [now] I say, 'OK, whose house are you living in?'"

Her dad used to joke that if her family and the Walshes down the street both used a toaster at the same time a transformer would blow. "Times have definitely changed since then," she said.

JoAnn and Peter bought the house from her dad in 1972. They raised their daughter there and have no plans to leave, even as

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Survey: Leave land alone

NORTH 40

By Jordan Mayblum
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In what will likely be a precursor to a larger town-wide public opinion poll, the North 40 Steering Committee heard the results of a neighborhood survey that reiterated residents' concerns about traffic and the future of the forest area just west of Wellesley Square.

"People don't want anything done with the land, which I realize may not be realistic in the context of the town buying the land," Woodlands resident and survey administrator Jack Davis said last week. "But that was the response so I felt like I should report that."

The Woodlands neighborhood, located close to Moses Pond, is bordered by Weston, Turner, and MacArthur roads.

According to Davis, over half of the households in his neighborhood responded to the survey, and the results echoed the sentiments of neighbors who attended a community meeting last month. Residents of the Woodlands neighborhood are worried about an influx of traffic and the loss of open space, he said.

Residents of both the Woodlands and the Weston Road corridor said in the survey that they'd be opposed to the addition of new residential housing on the North 40, which owner Wellesley College announced this spring

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WOODLANDS

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the remaining houses that resemble their own are demolished and replaced by what the Joneses call "McMansions."

"I'm not crazy about it to be honest," JoAnn said of the redevelopment of her neighborhood, which has included the loss of her old neighbors to increased taxes and ever-growing demand for property. They estimate that half of the original houses in the neighborhood have been replaced by bigger, more luxurious homes.

The house across the street is set to go along with the one immediately to the left of their home, they said. "We'll be the last ones standing," JoAnn said. "We have a bomb shelter in the back yard. I'd like to see them dig that up."

"We're actually starting to turn Wellesley into more of a Brookline," Peter said. "[It's] more of a city than a plain town that people were expecting."

If the town buys the North 40, Peter said, it would mean an increase in taxes to fund both the purchase itself and any ensuing development. If a developer buys it, new roads accessing the Woodlands, and the increased traffic from an influx of

residents, is a major concern, the Joneses said.

The issue has brought them and the neighborhood together, JoAnn said, as they work to voice their concerns loud and clear to the town officials who will ultimately decide if a purchase by the town is the right move.

"You're going to be adding a lot," JoAnn said of any potential development on the land.

There used to be a sign on the edge of the neighborhood that identified it as the Woodlands. Neither of the Joneses knows what happened to it, but they find themselves correcting newcomers who identify it as "The Generals."

The streets, which were named after generals and admirals, are one of the last remaining indications of the origins of the neighborhood as a place for World War II veterans and their often-large families.

Back when she was still JoAnn Leyland and sharing 5 Halsey Ave. with her parents and siblings rather than her husband, the neighborhood was teeming with activity. Every year on the Fourth of July neighbors would unveil the floats they'd spent weeks working on in secrecy at the neighborhood parade.

JoAnn said she doesn't remember exactly when the



The smaller homes visible in this old photo of a Fourth of July parade in the Woodlands are rapidly being torn down and replaced by much larger houses. COURTESY PHOTOS / JOANN JONES



An undated photo of a Fourth of July parade in the Woodlands.

last parade occurred, but a color photograph she has of one Woodlands family dressed as "The Flintstones" dates the end - sometime in the early-to-mid '60s.

Games of capture the flag would span the entire

street, she said, but over time the number of kids in the neighborhood has dropped considerably.

"It was definitely a wild, crazy neighborhood when I was a kid," she said. "It was the place to play."

FLOOR

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Department of Public Works and Municipal Light Plant for their willingness to work around the engines and ladder trucks.

Town Meeting approved the \$173,440 project - including a 10 percent

plastic wrap and should be installed before the end of October, Peterson said.

"It's not very exciting to look at... It is for us, though," Peterson said. Once all of the new systems are installed - new air handling units, a condenser, hot water heaters, a rooftop AC unit and circulating pumps, among others - the

the new HVAC system is installed and the transition from heating to cooling is less significant.

"This should all be very efficient when it's all done," he said, adding that the Facilities Maintenance Department would soon be able to monitor the building's systems the same way it does other town buildings.



NORTH 40

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would be placed on the market.

The college received approval from the Supreme Judicial Court to explore a sale, nullifying restrictions placed on the land by the college's founder over 150 years ago. The 40-plus acre area currently houses a forest, community gardens and walking trails that many survey respondents said they use regularly, Davis said.

"Least desired across the board was residential housing and low-income housing," Davis said. He acknowledged, though, that the results of the survey might have been skewed by the use of the latter term. "Keep in mind that if those terms were different it may have changed the results of the survey."

Town officials expressed similar concerns about the wording of the survey.

"Low-income housing is not a term that we use and that's one thing that worries me is that it scored so low because of that term," town Planning Director Michael Zehner said. "Any affordable housing that's in town is far from low-income housing."

"I worry that some of the terms used may have skewed some of the answers," he added. Any development of the

land, with the exception of lower impact recreational areas - playgrounds and fields, for example - was of concern to residents who took the survey, Davis said. If developed as a residential area, the town's zoning bylaws allow for as many as 80 to 100 new homes.

Still, over 80 percent of Woodlands survey-takers said that were worried about added traffic on an already-busy Weston Road and the potential that new roads accessing the Woodlands would be added to accommodate any development at the North 40.

Just over half of the households in the Woodlands responded, while 43 percent of households in the larger Weston Road corridor took part. In addition to added traffic and a denser population, Davis said the survey showed that a potential decrease in property values and the impact on the integrity of the neighborhood were a problem for neighbors.

A town-wide survey, according to members of the Steering Committee, could be re-worded to help officials better understand residents' true feelings on potential development.

The potential survey would be developed using a consultant, officials said, and would allow the results to be broken up by neighborhood so that feelings of North 40 neighbors could be compared to the town as a whole.

